

By Janine Lim

Jazz Up Your Curriculum



The Jazz Workshop offers a unique blend of **collaboration** and **constructivist learning** using videoconferencing and Web 2.0.

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Autonomy, passion, risk, innovation, listening. Five themes that are key to good jazz music are also the essential characteristics of the grassroots collaborative learning community Ken Conn, Bennie Tschoerner, and I began in 2005. The funny thing is, our workshop, 123 VC: Jazz-ing Up Your Curriculum with Videoconferencing, got its name long before I stumbled on a leadership lecture two years ago illustrating that the necessary ingredients of jazz music are the same as those required for a successful business environment. It dawned on me that our workshop also operates much the same way as a jazz quartet.

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What It's All About

The Jazz Workshop, as it has come to be known, is a unique blend of collaboration and constructivist learning using videoconferencing and Web 2.0 tools. Each summer it draws about 400 participants—mostly teachers, technology facilitators, teacher librarians, and videoconferencing coordinators—who convene in 20 locations across three countries and five states. Facilitators who have attended the workshop in the past as participants host the workshop at each of the sites, and lead facilitators, who have several years of experience with videoconferencing and at least two years of experience facilitating the workshop, organize the event.

The goal of the Jazz Workshop is to teach participants how to integrate videoconferencing into their curricula. We have embedded Web 2.0 tools in the workshop so that learning to use them is incidental. In addition, we hope participants will begin to collaborate with teachers in other states

or countries when designing their own videoconferencing lessons.

How It Works

The workshop is broken up into four components:

Simulations. Participants play the role of students experiencing popular videoconferencing formats, such as Read Around the Planet, a celebration of reading; Monster Match, a descriptive writing exchange; MysteryQuest, a geography game; and ASK, a literature-based program in which students interview an author or specialist.

Guest speakers. The guest speakers include videoconferencing content providers from zoos, museums, and other organizations that offer quality lessons to schools.

Small-group time. This is when four to six teachers from two locations plan a videoconferencing collaboration that meets their curricula goals.

Training. Throughout the week, participants learn to implement videoconferencing and other collaborative tools in their curricula.

Very little direct instruction occurs in a Jazz Workshop. Instead, participants are engaged in learning experiences where they apply existing knowledge to a task and learn from each other as they accomplish the assignments together. They might prepare and present geography clues to the teachers-as-students at the other locations, conduct Internet research to find locations presented by the other sites, write questions to interview a Vietnam veteran, or solve math problems with teachers at their location or one of the other sites.

What Participants Learn

Some participants come with few technology skills, whereas others are experts at integrating technology into the curriculum. Throughout the workshop,



participants may learn PowerPoint, polish their e-mail skills, and be exposed to collaborative tools, such as Google Docs, Skype, blogs, and Flickr. Whether newcomer or master at integrating technology, they all have an opportunity to expand their skills.

During small-group time, leaders emerge who may have more experience with videoconferencing and integrating technology into the curriculum. These leaders assist and mentor the other teachers as they write collaborative lesson plans together. By the end of the week, participants have built learning communities of teachers in two different locations.

Throughout the school year, the participants often collaborate on videoconferences, including the formats they learned during the summer workshop.

Sometimes they implement the projects they wrote together, and other times they create new collaborative videoconferencing projects. In some cases, participants host the Jazz Workshop at their locations the following year, continuing the cycle of learning, collaborating, and sharing.

Learning within the community is enhanced by the continual introduction of newcomers. The newcomers provide inexperience. Their involvement encourages reflection. Their contributions polish our practice. In this way, even the lead facilitators' participation is peripheral in that the community is constantly changing, growing, and learning.

How the Facilitators Fit In

To support this workshop, each of the five lead facilitators mentors a group

of three or four facilitators. The lead facilitators organize the activities, delegate tasks—such as leading a simulation or preparing materials—and coach the other facilitators. They all pitch in to prepare for and deliver the workshop. This way, the newcomers have access to the veterans, which enhances their learning.

Before the big event, we hold several meetings to walk through each part of the workshop. During the workshop, new facilitators may lead sections with the lead facilitators on hand in case questions arise. After each day, the facilitators debrief with their lead facilitator. As we discuss how the day went, they all learn, reflect, and refine their training practice. Throughout the Jazz Workshop, everyone contributes to the improvement of the event.

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
1 hour	Local Web 2.0 and Videoconference resource instruction				
2 hours	Simulations of collaborative videoconference formats, such as Read Around the Planet, Monster Match, Math Marvels, MysteryQuest, and the ASK program (four locations meet together for simulations)				Group presentations
1 hour	Lunch and local instruction				Grand finale celebration
1 hour	Guest speakers from zoos and museums that offer videoconferencing content (eight locations meet together for guest speakers)				
30 min.	Local reflection time				
1 hour	Small-group planning time with groups created across state borders (four locations split into 8–12 point-to-point videoconferences)				
30 min.	Reflection blogging				



Playing the role of students, participants experience popular videoconferencing formats, such as Read Around the Planet, a celebration of reading; Monster Match, a descriptive writing exchange; Mystery-Quest, a geography game; and ASK, a literature-based program in which students interview an author or specialist.

Collaboration Tools to Get You Started

Here's a list of tools you'll need to begin videoconferencing:

- ☐ H.323 or IP room-based videoconferencing system
- ☐ Skype for facilitators' back-channel chat and participants' chat to support their small-group planning meeting via videoconference
- ☐ Google Docs for facilitators to share files and for participants to write lesson plans
- ☐ Flickr to share photos of the workshop and to enhance the feeling of learning together across the distance
- ☐ 123vc.wordpress.com, a blog to reflect on learning
- ☐ Twitter to continue the conversation throughout the school year

Join the Gang

Thinking about participating in a Jazz Workshop? Begin by reviewing the website at www.123vc.org to see the tools and technologies we use. You will need access to a training facility with the ability to do at least two H.323 videoconferences.

You should be ready to contribute, and not just host the workshop at your site! You can find the participation application online at www.123vc.net.

You can also use this format as a template for your own training. What technology integration workshop wouldn't be enhanced by connecting to another set of educators in another state or country?

Use your Web 2.0 personal learning network to recruit a colleague or two. Start small by connecting your workshops via videoconferencing and Web 2.0 tools for only part of the workshop. Use our materials if you wish, or develop your own. We strongly suggest creating and sharing materials with a Creative Commons license to facilitate greater learning and participation in the wider educational technology community. You will find that your participants benefit from breaking down the walls of the training room and will therefore find it easier to see how to break down the walls of their classrooms.

—Janine Lim

The Lead Facilitators' Role

A new facilitator is often overwhelmed with the complexity of the workshop and the details that must be attended to. The lead facilitators start by giving new facilitators simple tasks, such as preparing an introduction to a simulation or debriefing a simulation using an existing PowerPoint overview. As new facilitators gain skills, they begin to contribute knowledge, handouts, and resources to improve the quality of the workshop. As they learn the components of the Jazz Workshop, they learn the culture of the workshop, the ways we integrate videoconferencing in the curriculum, and the foundational beliefs of constructivist learning and collaboration.

In the first year of facilitating the Jazz Workshop, the newcomers get the big picture or broad view of what it is all about. After they understand how the workshop operates, the facilitators compare notes and learn professional development techniques from each other. Web 2.0 tools, such as Skype chat, facilitator blogs, and Twitter, contribute to the circulation of information and knowledge within the Jazz learning community.

The professional development model of the Jazz Workshop would not be possible without the collaborative technologies that connect us. In addition, we sometimes meet each other face to face at conferences, where we strengthen those relationships. The benefit to our participants is an incredibly diverse and engaging workshop.



Janine Lim has been coordinating videoconferencing for 22 school districts in southwest Michigan since 1999. She is a cofounder of Two Way Interactive Connections in Education (www.TWICE.cc), and she teaches online classes about using video conferencing. Read her blog about videoconferencing at www.vcoultonalim.org.

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